Man's foot is all his own. It is unlike any other foot. It is the most distinctly human part of the whole of his anatomical make-up. It is a human specialisation and, whether he be proud of it or not, it is his hallmark and so long as Man has been Man and so long as he remains Man it is by his feet that he will be known from all other members of the animal kingdom.

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Do you regularly inspect your feet?

Do you think your feet are important? Not many people do. Most people only notice their feet when they cause problems, and that happens to nearly everyone at some time during a lifetime.

This booklet will help you to understand more about your feet, the way they are made and what they do. It looks at some of the more common foot problems, how to prevent such problems in the first place and the way foot problems are treated by doctors and foot specialists, called chiropodists.
Have you noticed any of these problems in your feet?

- Ingrowing Toenails
- Corn
- Bunion
- Athlete's Foot
- Fungus Infection of the Nail
- Verruca
About Your Feet

The foot is made up of 26 bones, 19 muscles and about 30 joints. So there are a lot of things that can cause problems.

The foot does many things; it acts as a supple shock absorber for the heel when it hits the ground and it acts as a strong lever to push the body forwards from the toes when walking. The foot, combined with the other senses, also helps us maintain our balance.

We all have an arch on the sole of the feet, a space between the ball of the foot and the heel. The purpose of the arch is to make the foot strong as well as mobile.

Flat feet are feet that have a low arch. The opposite is cavus type, where the arch is very high. When we walk we put one and a quarter times our body weight on each foot. So it is very important to make sure your feet work properly.

Footwear

The right footwear is essential for healthy feet. Shoes have to be long enough for our feet so that the toes are not squashed. They should also be wide enough for your particular feet to prevent squashing from side to side, and rubbing. Lastly there should be enough height in the toe area to prevent the tops of the toes rubbing against the shoe.

Keeping Your Feet Clean

Because we keep our feet wrapped up in socks and shoes all day, they get sweaty. Wet and warm feet are ideal places for germs to grow. So it is important to wash your feet every day with a mild soap. Change your socks and tights every day as well.
Foot Problems in Detail

Toenail Problems

Ingrowing toenails are caused by a splinter of nail piercing the side of the toe and digging into the flesh. If untreated, the skin may become red, shiny and swollen and look infected. It will be very painful to even the slightest pressure. Visit your doctor or chiropodist who will remove the offending piece of nail and care for the toe until it is better.

Ingrowing toenails can be avoided by not cutting your nails too short, especially at the sides of the nail. If you find it difficult to cut your nails, the simplest solution is to cut them square.

Toenails aren’t flat; they are curved. But sometimes a nail can curve too much causing a complaint called involuted toenails. It is not always painful but can be if the sides of the nail have curved so much that the toe feels pinched. Your doctor or chiropodist can treat it by routine cutting or by fitting a nail brace which will help to reduce the curve. Occasionally an operation is needed to remove the over-curved edge of the nail. The operation destroys the nail bed so that the edges of the nail don’t grow back again.

Toenails can become infected by fungus. This is a painless condition but it can cause the nail to change colour and thicken making the nails unsightly and causing discomfort for some people. Fungal nail infection can result from not keeping your feet clean enough or from the spread of athlete’s foot which you already have. If left untreated the nails can become more severely affected. In the past this condition has been treated with a tablet called griseofulvin.

However, more recently, a tablet has become available, called terbinafine, which can be prescribed by your family doctor. Treatment with these tablets not only helps to cure the nail infection, but also assists in clearing associated fungal skin infections at the same time, for example athlete’s foot. Antifungal nail paints such as tioconazole and amorolfine are also used to treat fungal nail infection.

Osteoarthritis is a condition that can affect all joints in the body and is possibly caused by too much wear and tear. The protective cartilage at the ends of two bones wears away, leaving two ends of raw bone to rub together. It is very painful. It affects the big toe because so much pressure is placed on this joint every day. The pain can be reduced by wearing a pair of stiff-soled shoes (like leather) which stops the joint from moving so much. A chiropodist can fit a special insole to your shoes. Your doctor may suggest a minor operation to repair the damaged joint.

Big Toe Problems

A bunion occurs when the big toe is not straight but is turned outwards. This makes the bone at the base of the big toe stick out and become sore due to rubbing against your shoes.

Bunions can be caused by wearing shoes that are too tight or narrow but some families are more prone to them than others. A chiropodist can help to protect the bunion from pressure. Your doctor may also suggest that you have a small operation which should ease your problem.

Burrowing little toes is a common condition in which the little toes turn inwards under the next toes. Some children are born with this and adults can develop it later in life, especially if they have bunions or flat feet. A chiropodist will fit a little removeable splint to straighten the toe. This is usually successful but occasionally a small operation is needed.